December 3, 2019

To the Graduate Program:

This project, entitled "English Phonics for Spanish-speaking Learners" and written by Maria Catalina Palacio Cortes, is presented to the Graduate Program of Greensboro College. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a Major in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

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Paula Wilder, Advisor

We have reviewed this
project and recommend its
acceptance:

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Director, Graduate Program in TESOL

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Chair, Department of English

Accepted for the Graduate Program

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Jane C. Girardi

ENGLISH PHONICS FOR SPANISH-SPEAKING
LEARNERS

Presented to
the Graduate Program
of
Greensboro College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

by
Maria Catalina Palacio Cortes

May 2020

Advisor: Paula Wilder

Abstract

This project is intended for adult Spanish-speaking learners who struggle with identifying and producing English sounds as they tend to use the sounds in their native language. A website has been developed in order to help these learners be aware of the sounds of English and reduce their Spanish accent by being explicitly exposed to recognizing, identifying, and producing new and different sounds in the target language. Due to the complications these learners have producing more than five vowel sounds, the website presented in this project proposes a series of lessons, each dedicated to a sound that does not exist in the Spanish language or that differs from the English language (long and short vowels and consonant sounds). Activities include a compilation of sources with listening tasks, rhyming tasks, reading tasks, videos, and games.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Having taught in Colombia for over ten years as an English teacher has given me the chance to see that it is difficult for Spanish speakers to reach a native way of speaking English. It is interesting to notice that many adult Spanish speakers cannot reduce their accent and come up with precise English sounds.

After witnessing how younger English learners acquire the target language smoothly (in terms of pronunciation), I have come to think that it is older learners and adults who struggle with identifying and producing the sounds of American English. According to Rao and Kuder (2016), there is actually little research on the interference that Spanish sounds have when it comes to young learners as it is presumed that these types of learners often have a good accent or sound native-like.

However, when older learners and adults learn a foreign or second language, they tend to use the sounds they use in their native language's alphabetic and sound systems. For instance, in the case of Spanish speakers, they tend to mute the sound that the letter /h/ makes; or they tend to sound the letter /j/ as the letter /h/ sounds in English. Also, they have difficulties producing more than five vowel sounds because in Spanish there are only five (a, e, i, o, u) whereas in English there are 12. These and many other situations are experienced by older English learners (ELs) when they are learning English but have already mastered their L1.

In the case of young learners, there are several features in common that Spanish and English sounds share and that work as a channel for transferring skills for English-language

learners. Thus, it is helpful for these types of learners to rely on these common features between their home language and the new one (Helman, 2014).

Consequently, this project consists of a website developed to help adult Spanish-speaking English learners become more familiar with the sounds of English and provide them with activities to increase their knowledge of English phonetical awareness. This project presents several lessons, each dedicated to a sound that does not exist in the Spanish alphabet or that differs from the sounds used in Spanish. The first lessons are dedicated to the long and short sounds for the vowels in English, and the remainder lessons are dedicated to the consonants that have a different sound in English such as *g, h, j, q, r, y, z.*

I consider this project important as many people from Spanish-speaking countries are coming to the United States to live and look for new opportunities. Most of them come with their native language already mastered looking for opportunities for a job, education, housing, and/or learning a new language. I am positive that all these people can benefit from a website that allows them to practice with English sounds in all four basic communicative skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, not only will these people benefit from it, but the website can also benefit people who remain in Spanish-speaking countries and want to learn English as a foreign language.

The kinds of sources that I am referencing are studies and research projects that explore the difficulties that native Spanish speakers have with phonics and with English pronunciation. Also, projects about how accent influences the way learners speak a second language, about the practices that are effective for teaching phonics to both kids and adults, studies about a possible

phonemic awareness in a second language, and research made upon the idea that adult learners are affected by age.

Thus, considering the Spanish alphabet and sound systems and its differences with the sounds of English, I am developing this project to consider possible difficulties that older Spanish-speakers may have when learning English. It suggests a series of lessons that can be carried out in order to make the process of learning English phonics smoother through a more technological approach.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature review presented is related to how Spanish-speaking English learners approach English language sounds. This review begins with a discussion of the differences between the sound systems of both English and Spanish and the hypothesis of transferring skills within languages, followed by a synopsis on foreign accents and pronunciation. Then, there is an overview of the research related to English learners, especially those who speak Spanish and some teaching implications in the field. Finally, this review concludes with a showcase on the distinctions of age when learning a second language.

English and Spanish Sound Systems

According to Martinez and Reyes (2016), in order to learn a foreign language, learners need to assimilate to the new language system, which means that they are required to understand the pronunciation of words as well as their meaning and correct uses within phrases and paragraphs. Correspondingly, Martinez and Reyes (2016) argued that Hispanic brains are trained to divide all vowel sounds into five different classes, whereas American brains can distinguish between 12 pure vowels in addition to eight diphthongs and two triphthongs. Consequently, when Spanish speakers listen to English, they can only identify five vowels [a, e, i, o, u]. This situation happens because Spanish is a phonetic language, but English is not; particularly, in the English language, a phoneme can correspond to two or three graphemes. Accordingly, Rao and Kuder (2016) asserted that vowels are usually seen as stable in Spanish, meaning they are not generally transformed by features such as syllable stress, as in the case in English.

Mathes et al. (2007) highlighted that a significant difference between teaching English and Spanish was the need to teach more sophisticated strategies for word recognition in English than in Spanish because English has more orthographic to phonology inconsistencies than Spanish. According to Mathes et al. (2007), learning to read English takes more time than learning to read Spanish, as children have to distinguish when vowels are pronounced short or long, teamed, and r-controlled, and identify the schwa sound, as well as dealing with the exceptions of the English sound system.

As reported by Burrows et al. (2019), although English and Spanish are both Indo-European languages, their phonologies are quite different, which means that the learning of English phonology by a Spanish-speaking child is a significant undertaking. Phonemic vowel sounds in English double that of the Spanish language, and English phonemic consonant sounds are 25% larger than the Spanish phonemic consonant repertoire (Stockwell & Bowen, 1965). Although English and Spanish have different spelling, they share many of the same consonant sounds and consonant clusters. Among some of the English consonant sounds that also exist in the Spanish language, we can find the letters *p, b, t, d, k, g, m, n, f, s, w, y, ch*, and *l*. Likewise, among the consonant clusters that are shared include *pl, pr, bl, br, tr, dr, cl, cr, gl, gr, fl,* and *fr* (Helman, 2004).

Furthermore, the addition of different vowel sounds of English results in difficulty for a Spanish-speaking English-language learner due to Spanish having only one sound per vowel, "The schwa sound is the most common vowel sound in English and does not even occur in Spanish... If the home language does not have the specific English vowel sound, a student may try to use the closest sounding vowel to substitute" (Helman, 2004, p. 5).

As reported by Ehri (1998), by contrasting the sounds of Spanish and English, we can predict possible difficulties that learners may have in distinguishing specific sounds in English; being aware of these sounds and the attaching letters to represent them are crucial aspects of the alphabetic spelling for beginning readers. Moreover, in his study, Helman (2004) referred back to Goldstein and Kress (2000; 1993) to highlight that when a sound is not present in one's native language, this sound is likely difficult to hear and produce. The sounds that are present in English but not in Spanish are likely to constitute difficulties for Spanish speakers learning English.

Transferring Skills

Regarding transferring skills, Burrows et al. (2019) referred to two different perspectives in which this phenomenon can happen. On the one hand, the positive transfer is believed to happen when elements acquired in L1 are similar enough to those of L2 to be used with little or no modification. On the other hand, negative transfer (also referred to as "interference"), is believed to happen when elements of L1 are not similar enough to transfer to L2 and, therefore, make the process of acquisition slower (Gass & Selinker, 1993; Kroll & Stewart, 1994; MacWhinney, 1997). An excellent example of positive transfer is phonological awareness across the languages of bilingual children. Likewise, an excellent example of interference is the exhibition of unusual phonological patterns among bilingual children.

According to Burrows et al. (2019), the development of a robust phonological basis is imperative for young Spanish-speaking English learners. Although some of their L1 phonological knowledge may probably help in the acquisition of an L2, there may also be

irregularities, transfer in their L2 productions or conflict, and interaction between trends learned within each language. In his study, Major (2010) indicated that research has shown that in speakers who have acquired more than one language, there is mutual interaction of the languages, not merely a unidirectional L1 to L2 transfer, as had previously been assumed. Setter and Jenkins (2005) also stated Major's idea (2010) that interference is more likely to happen during the early stages of phonological acquisition where a learner manages to use phonemes borrowed from his L1, but according to Major (2010), this interference declines over time, and developmental aspects surpass this interference as the language learner acquires the target language.

Foreign Accents and Pronunciation

Benmamoun, Montrul, and Polinsky (2010) discussed that heritage language users, bilingual children who grow up with exposure to a minority language at home, appear to show a more native-like sound system than L2 learners. Benmamoun et al. (2010) argued that their speech has changing degrees of traces in a heritage accent, which is due to the unique acquisitional experiences they have had, and native speakers of the same community can perceive accents as a negative feature of their speech. Rao and Kuder (2016) also referred to heritage language users and suggested they have a deeper appreciation and understanding of any accent as being a product of their unique linguistic and cultural richness, and not perceiving accents as a worse way of speaking than a native speaker.

In their study on foreign accents, Witteman, Weber, and McQueen (2013) demonstrated that although foreign accents give speech variation, native speech has considerable variability as

well. Witteman et al. (2013) confirmed that most of the research about speech variation is rooted in the first language. In a foreign-accented speech, speakers might substitute target language sounds with native language sounds when these sounds (target language) are not available in the speaker's native language. On the same topic, Kissling (2014) attested that when the L1 is similar to the L2; when the learner starts at a younger age; when the learner resides in the L2 environment longer; or when there is more exposure to the L2, learners are less likely to have a foreign accent.

Regarding pronunciation, Setter and Jenkins (2005) highlighted some key points. First, it is commonly considered difficult to teach and learn pronunciation in a second language environment. Secondly, proper pronunciation is crucial to achieving accurate communication between both the receptor and the producer of the message. Third, pronunciation tends to be part of our unconscious mind; consequently, it is not easy to manipulate. Also, Setter and Jenkins (2005) asserted that pronunciation seems to be mainly bound up with identity. Our accents are an expression of who we are or aspire to be, of how we want to be seen by others, of the social communities with which we identify or seek membership, and of whom we admire or ostracize. Likewise, our accents are also likely to indicate a subconscious and robust attachment to our mother tongue (Setter & Jenkins, 2005).

Besides, Jenkins (2004) stated that pronunciation teaching covers consonant and vowel sounds, changes to the sounds in the stream of connected speech, word stress patterns, rhythm, and intonation. Moreover, Jenkins (2004) postulated that the research that has been done in the field of pronunciation has allowed the concept "to reemerge as a more flexible and relevant language phenomenon, able to adapt to its context of use and to relate in both teaching and

research to other linguistic areas, most notably (but not exclusively) discourse and sociolinguistics" (Jenkins, 2004, p. 12) . Likewise, Kissling (2013) highlighted that phonetics instruction in the language classroom usually centers on the differences between the L1 and L2 sound systems, including features such as phonemic inventories, articulation of analogous phones, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and phonological processes, phoneme discrimination and identification.

Spanish-Speaking English Learners

In regards to Spanish speakers, Rao and Kuder (2016) referred to heritage language users as bilinguals who grow up with exposure to a minority language at home (in this case, Spanish). This type of learner tends to have difficulties with grapheme-phoneme mapping and stress placement, primarily because of their lack of metalinguistic awareness of Spanish or because of interference from English.

Furthermore, Helman (2004) highlighted two main areas that may constitute a problem for English learners. First, the difficulty to pronounce consonants at the end of words in English because those sounds are not permissible in Spanish; for instance, words like crab (/-b/), sniff (/-f/), beg (/-g/), or flop (/-p/) may constitute problems for Spanish speakers. Also, clusters of consonants at the end of words in English would represent another big challenge for the learners, for instance, words like *hard (/-rd/), curl (/-rl/),* or *best* (/-st/). Helman (2004) conveyed that Spanish speakers may delete sounds at the end of words or substitute sounds with others sounds they are more comfortable with in order to respond to the pronunciation challenges.

Teaching Implications

In regards to teaching, Martinez and Reyes (2016) suggested Spanish-speaking English learners work on the recognition of the new sounds and their production by using techniques for the discrimination of phonemes in words as well as techniques for the retraining of the phonation organs and the reformation of the ability of listening comprehension. Similarly, in their study, Mathes et at. (2007) proposed a series of instructional strands to work with Spanish-speaking English learners who were struggling with reading. These strands include teaching how to isolate individual sounds in words, identifying initial and final phonemes, as well as teaching learners to segment one-syllable words into individual phonemes, and to recognize words from individual spoken phonemes.

Additionally, Mathes et at. (2007) suggested teaching children how to map phonemes-graphemes correspondences, how to sound out words, to blend sounds, and to identify sight words that were irregular or did not follow pronunciation rules. Likewise, Burrows (2019) proposed English learners transitioning from being oral language users to readers and spellers, to become aware of tap in much the same way they become aware of other speech sounds as their phonemic awareness increases.

In the same way, in a study conducted with Japanese-speaking English learners, Franklin and McDaniel (2016) advised that in the case of training adult English learners, the goal would be to help them move from the interlanguage zone to the target language zone. Franklin and McDaniel (2016) asserted that having the most significant amount of system-wide change in their phonological system would help them; this through what is called "cycles approach," an approach commonly used in the remediation of speech sound disorders in children. This

approach consists of an analysis of the speaker's phonological patterns in which specific processes are addressed for a period of time. Afterward, the cycle is repeated to reintroduce the processes that were not remediated in the first cycle, allowing the speaker exposure to several different sounds contrasts in the target language. (Franklin & McDaniel, 2016)

In his study about teaching English to adults at commercial language schools, Tarnopolsky (2016) proposed six principles to develop a program for adults successfully. First, developing courses based on the needs and interests of learners second, taking learners' attitudes to the methods of teaching into account; third, offering courses with autonomy that are also completed combined with the unity of all; fourth having limited intensiveness of the teaching/learning process; fifth avoiding home tasks; and lastly, introducing the culture of English into the teaching.

Furthermore, in a study on synthetic and analytic phonics methods, Johnston, Mcgeown, and Watson (2011) stated that when teaching phonics in English speaking countries, the instruction commonly begins by learning to recognize sight words, which constitutes an analytic approach. Simultaneously, children learn to recognize letter sounds at the beginning, end, and in the middle of words. Later they are taught to decode printed words by blending sounds. Consequently, Johnston et al. (2011) demonstrated during their studies that after more than five years of schooling, "children taught by the synthetic phonics approach read words, spelled words and had reading comprehension skills significantly in advance of those taught by the analytic phonics method" (Johnston, et al., 2011, p. 16). This study has confirmed that the synthetic phonics approach is useful even though English has an opaque orthography.

By the same token, in regards to English and Spanish, Morin (2007) argued that only teachers who have a specific knowledge based in Spanish can help students become aware of differences and similarities between the alphabetic systems of both English and Spanish, describe language phonological features, diagnose pronunciation problems, discuss variations, or help students be aware of different intonational patterns in Spanish and English.

Adults vs. Children

In regards to the characterization of adults and children as language learners and who constitutes better English learners, Flege (2002) demonstrated that younger L2 learners are more likely to have L2- like vowels than older learners. However, in the same study, Flege (2002) attested that younger learners could not be expected to sound native-like. Likewise, Flege (2002) demonstrated that early bilinguals or young L2 learners sound native-like to a greater extent than late bilinguals or older L2 learners in terms of understanding the grammar of the L2, processing L2 sentences, and producing and perceiving L2 speech, (both vowels and consonants).

On the contrary, regarding adults learning a second language, Franklin and McDaniel (2016) proposed that their speech might be affected by two factors which include the interference between their L1 and the target language and some other personal variables, such as the time they have been speaking the target language, their motivation, and age. Franklin and McDaniel (2016) referred to Flege (1981; 1995) in their study to highlight the idea that "the decrease in pronunciation proficiency with increased age of learning is gradual rather than precipitous because the phonetic systems of adults remain malleable throughout their lifetime" (p. 2). Similarly, Franklin and McDaniel (2016) restated Flege's idea (1981) that time spent speaking

the target language or direct instruction in phonics can reshape an adult's phonological system. Consequently, Franklin and McDaniel (2016) argued that adult ELLs produce phonological processes (vocalization, final consonant devoicing, cluster reduction, gliding, final consonant deletion, stopping, prevocalic voicing, and epenthesis) as a result of interlanguage influences between their L1 and L2.

Additionally, according to Weiner (2005), at the early stages of English learning, adults cannot even imagine how their teacher does not use their L1 to explain, organize, and clarify the meaning of unknown vocabulary. Weiner (2005) advised following the approach proposed by Atkinson (1987) in which, at the early stages of learning, teachers use the students' L1 for explanation and class organization. However, after students start building some language, their L1 is used less so that by the start of the intermediate levels, the L1 does not have any place in the teaching/learning process at all.

In similar fashion, in their study about ESL practices with children and adults, Hird et al. (2000) showed that although teachers might share some standard practices, they differed in the practices they use with each group of students, confirming that the learners' age makes a difference to what language teachers plan and execute in the language classrooms. Hird et al. (2000) concluded that the differences in the practices with adults and children are indicative that teachers perceive age as a factor affecting the methods to help students learn the target language. Also, Hird et al. (2000) asserted that children have more time to explore and discover the language while adults look forward to learning the target language faster.

In like manner, in his paper about adult English learners in Spain, Castañeda (2017) stated that adult students might be restarting their education willing to acquire new knowledge,

abilities, competences, interests, and values that can help them prepare in terms of globalization and continue to achieve their objectives. Castañeda (2017) described adult learners as being autonomous, active, responsible, committed, subjective, and with a tremendous individual identity. However, it is highlighted that adults encounter two critical difficulties when learning English. First of all, the neurological limitation that hinders foreign language acquisition due to their age, and second, the affective variables that stop them from learning the target language, which includes fear, hesitation, lack of motivation and confidence, low self-esteem, and language anxiety. "Language anxiety among adult students is one of the direct consequences derived from the use of new L2 communicative methodologies in age-diverse contexts. Students are not used to communicative strategies when learning foreign languages and adaptation is an arduous process" (Castañeda, 2017, p.149).

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature related to Spanish-speaking English learners, differences between English and Spanish, language transference, accents, pronunciation and teaching implications in the field, and age distinctions among language learners, we can conclude that there is vast research that supports the reasoning behind this project. Taking into account the differences between the Spanish and the English language sound systems, this project will be carried out to help adult learners work on specific pronunciation challenges and difficulties. As a result of the research, this project suggests a series of lessons that can be studied in order to make the process of learning English phonics smoother.

Chapter Three: Project Design

In this chapter, I explain the rationale for proposing a tool that helps adult English learners with identifying and producing the sounds of American English since they have complications attaining a native-like English accent. As stated by Navracsics (2014), influences from cross-linguistic environments are natural in the development of other languages, and the dominant language is expected to have an impact on the weaker ones, which in this case is English.

Due to the complications Spanish speakers have producing more than five vowel sounds, this project presents a website that will explicitly focus on long and short vowels in English as well as consonant sounds that differ from the Spanish language. Hence, this project will present several lessons, each dedicated to a sound that does not exist in the Spanish alphabet, or that differs from the sounds of Spanish.

As suggested by Reyes and Martinez (2016), Spanish-speaking English learners need to be taught to isolate individual sounds in words, identify initial and final phonemes, segment one-syllable words into individual phonemes, and recognize words from individual spoken phonemes. Consequently, some lessons in this project will help adult learners work with phoneme segmentation and isolation of sounds in order to develop phonemic awareness of the English language.

Moreover, Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, and Beeler (1998) stated that phonemic awareness becomes a challenge for many learners because they process the phonemes automatically, directing their attention to the meaning and the force of the utterance as a whole

instead of noticing the phonemes, discovering their existence and separability. In other words, Adams et al. (1998) proposed shifting attention from the meaning of language to its form in order to develop conscious and reflective awareness of the target language's parts and how they combine in productive language. In this sense, with this project, I want adult English learners to be aware of the sounds in each word to be able to break words into phonemes and then make new words by adding or dropping phonemes. From my experience as an English learner in Colombia, I consider that learners in a foreign language environment direct attention to meaning and the utterance as a whole, making the processing of phonemes automatic rather than figuring out separate phonemes in words and understanding their flexibility to build new utterances.

Regarding phonemic awareness in adults, Dellicarpini (2011) established a relationship between phonemic awareness and initial decoding ability for adult second language learners who have low or no L1 literacy and who share an L1 (Spanish). Although most adult learners are likely to have already developed phonemic awareness in their L1, through this project, we can help adult learners become aware of the sounds in American English. As a native Spanish-speaking learner, I consider that being explicitly exposed to recognizing, identifying, and producing new and different sounds in the target language is necessary to produce more accurate sounds and for attaining a more native-like accent.

This project also focuses on the rationale that age is a determiner for attaining a native-like accent. On one hand, Navracsics (2014) suggested that, due to the plasticity of the brain in early stages in childhood, the articulatory system adapts more easily to the sounds of the target language, a process that is not as successful at later ages. On the other hand, Olson and Samuels (1973) advised that the assumption that children have better pronunciation than adults may be

due to an environmental-sociological explanation. According to their studies, peers are the ones that serve as a model of the target language pronunciation. As adults tend to relate more with peers who speak their native language, they cultivate poor pronunciation habits whereas children relate with other native-speaking peers and teachers with ease, and these serve as accurate models of the target language pronunciation and accents.

Accordingly, in terms of the website proposal and design, some of the activities that will be provided in order to develop an awareness of the sounds of the English language include listening tasks, rhyming tasks, reading tasks, videos, and games. These activities and tasks are a compilation of other sources that have been created and shared to help English learners in general, regardless of their age.

Chapter Four: Project

The present project suggests a website with a compilation of tasks to assist Spanish-speaking adult English learners in becoming aware of the different sound systems English and Spanish have and, therefore, using a more accent–free and accurate English pronunciation. By accessing these tasks, it is expected that both teachers and students can benefit from using them in phonics and pronunciation courses. The website can be accessed at the URL

https://englishphonicsforspanishspeakers.weebly.com/

The website has been divided into seven sections, the first five sections are designed to help Spanish speakers differentiate the sounds of their five vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and the five long and short English vowels. According to Martinez and Reyes (2016) the brains of Spanish speakers are trained to divide all vowel sounds into those five different classes while the brains of English speakers can distinguish between 12 pure vowels in addition to eight diphthongs and two triphthongs.

Consequently, each vowel has its own section in order to study how short and long vowels sound and how they are produced differently from one language to the other. Each vowel is then subdivided into short sound and long sound, and each subsection is broken into four parts: "Learn it" (See Figure 4.1), *"*Practice it", "Play it", and "Extension activity". In the "Learn it" section, learners are invited to consider the differences between the sounds they hear in English and Spanish, and they are invited to watch one or two videos from *Youtube* that show them the positioning of the mouth and tongue, some rules that may apply to each sound, and examples of

words and sentences. This first task also invites learners to practice saying the words from the
videos and the ones posted on pictures and writing them down on a piece of paper.
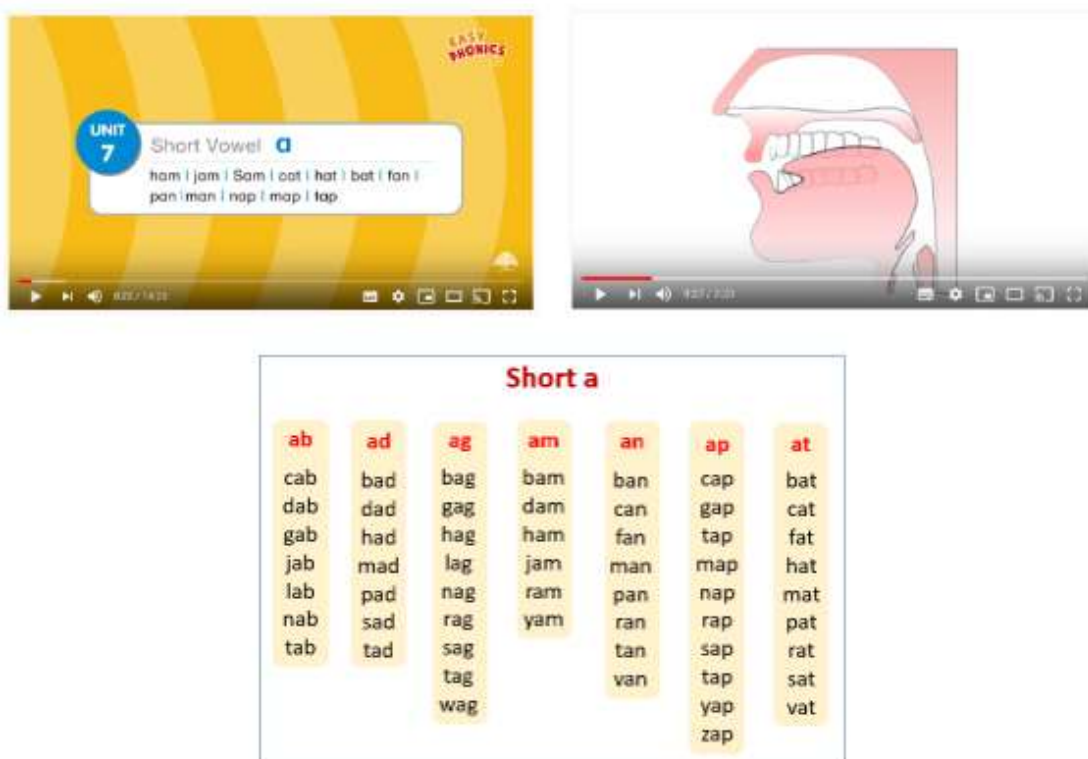
In the "Practice it" (See Figure 4.2) section, all activities for short and long vowels
request students to listen to passages or sentences and practice reading them several times, and
through the use of a voice recorder, read the passages aloud in order to listen to themselves and
assess their own performance.

Practice it!

Listen to this passage and practice reading it several times. Use a voice recorder and read the passage aloud. Listen to yourself... How did it go? Then, circle the words that you found with short e sound.

Click here: mcedservices.com/phonics/school/school.html

Tool: use this link to record your story. https://online-voice-recorder.com/es/
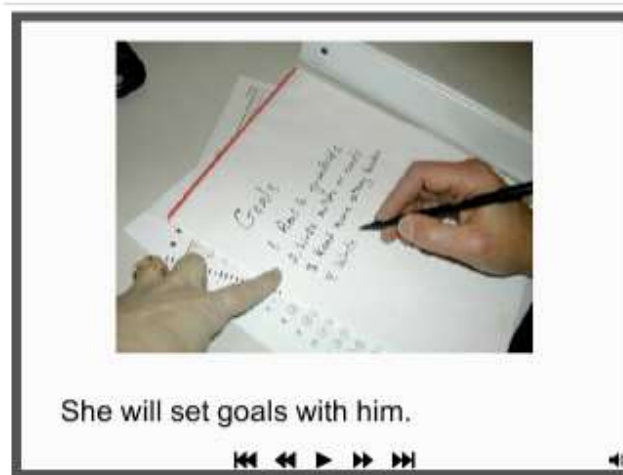

She will set goals with him.

Figure 4.2: Practice it!

In the short vowels' "Play it" section (See Figure 4.3), learners can use fun and simple games from www.education.com, a website with digital resources, tools, and learning materials developed by educational experts. The games in this section are linked in order to learn words that have similar endings and notice the differences in words. Also, students need to spell words correctly and split into onsets and rimes.

Play it!

Short E Rhyme Match-Up

By learning words that have similar sounds it becomes easier to notice the slight differences in words and become better readers.

Click on the link to play the matching game and find the words that match the short /e/ sound. www.education.com/game/short-e-moving-match/

Figure 4.3: Play it! Short Vowels

In the long vowels' "Play it" section (See Figure 4.4), students are linked to play in *Tinycards*, a Duolingo app that allows users to study and memorize vocabulary through the use of cards. In these tasks, cards with audio were selected to help students focus on the pronunciation and sounds of words.

Play it!

Click on the link to play with words that have the long o sound.

https://tinycards.duolingo.com/decks/NVrRzpva/long-o-spelling

Figure 4.4: Play it! Long Vowels

In the "Extension activity" section (See Figure 4.5), tasks have been added to give students some more time to practice the new sounds on their own. Tasks include printable card games, crosswords, fill in the blank worksheets, alphabetical ordering worksheets, and storytelling.
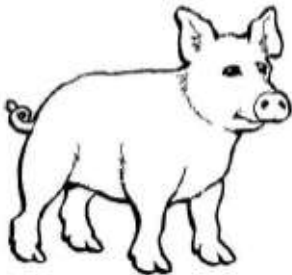
Extension activity

Find words with short i sound and write them in alphabetical order. Then, create your own short i phonics passage using the words in this activity

Click here to download the file if necessary. **extension.pdf**

Short I Words

Circle the *short i* words.

pig	time	it
five	big	red
mom	him	her
side	sit	did

Figure 4.5: Play it! Long Vowels

After focusing on long and short vowels, a section on consonants has been designed to study which consonant sounds differ from those in Spanish as these two languages share 26 graphemes (See figure 4.6). As reported by Burrows et al. (2019), English phonemic consonant sounds are 25 percent larger than the Spanish phonemic consonant repertoire (Stockwell & Bowen, 1965). Among some of the English consonant sounds that also exist in the Spanish language, we can find the letters p, b, c, t, d, k, m, n, f, s, w, y, ch, and l. Likewise, among the consonant clusters that are shared include pl, pr, bl, br, tr, dr, cl, cr, gl, gr, fl, and fr (Helman, 2004). In this section, the letters h, j, g, q, v, y, and z are addressed through videos from *Youtube* and vocabulary games from *Tinycards* to help Spanish-speaking learners understand how these

consonants sound different in both languages and how to help their native language sound system not interfering with the production of the new language. According to Witteman et al. (2013), in a foreign-accented speech, speakers might substitute target language sounds with native language sounds when these sounds (target language) are not available in the speaker's native language" (p.539).
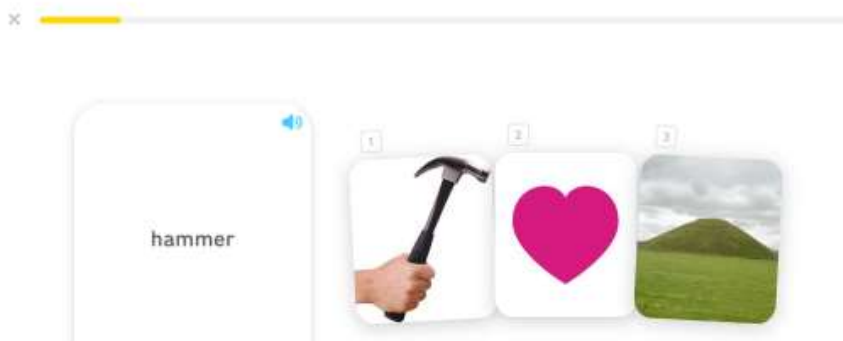

Figure 4.6: Consonant Sounds

Finally, some games on rhyming and segmenting have been compiled in the last section (See figure 4.7) of the website to help Spanish-speaking learners shift attention from the meaning of language to its form and to develop conscious and reflective awareness of the target language's parts and how they combine in productive language as suggested by Adams et al. (1998). With these tasks I want adult English learners be aware of the sounds in each word to be able to break words apart into phonemes and then make new words by adding or dropping phonemes.

Rhyming words

If you want to develop some awareness of the sounds of English you can play this matching game. Match the rhyming words in this phonological awareness game. Students are shown pictures of common CVC words, and are tasked with matching each one with a rhyming word. A narrator reads out the word to help with auditory reinforcement. Hearing rhymes helps to build key phonics skills.

www.education.com/game/match-rhyming-words/

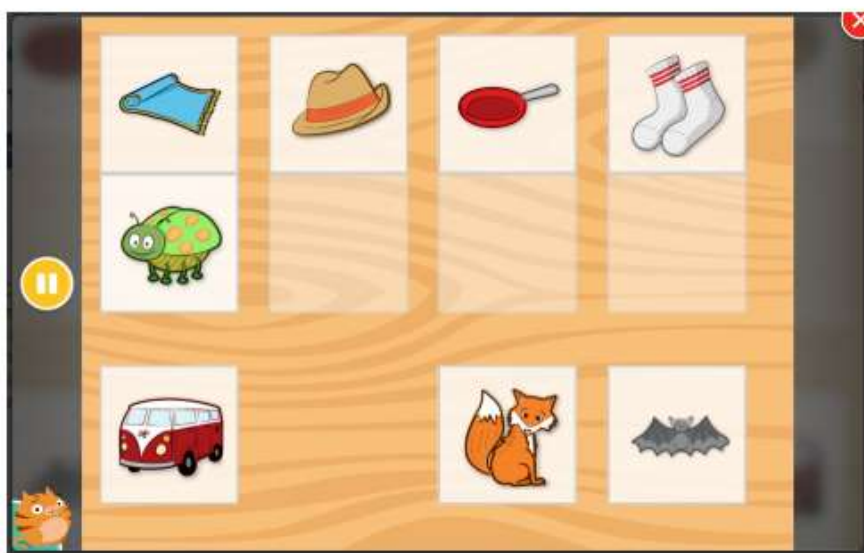*Figure 4.7: Rhyming and Segmenting*

Chapter Five: Conclusion

As a Spanish-speaking English learner in a foreign language environment such as Colombia and far from having the chance of learning from native teachers, I have struggled throughout my academic and professional life to sound native-like and accent-free. The truth is, it is very difficult for people who learn English abroad to sound native because our accent is part of our cultural identity and heritage. Furthermore, it is common for our brain to transfer the sounds and alphabetic principles of our L1 into the new language.

However, although we must value and appreciate our accent and heritage roots, I believe that learning a new language should start by learning its alphabetic and sound system prior to studying other concepts in the same way that kindergarten students learn in English-speaking countries when they attend school. If we are able to understand the sounds in the new language, we will have a better foundation to identify, understand, and produce new patterns in pronunciation.

As a result, and recognizing that just like me, many other adults who already speak English or are learning English as a foreign or second language, this project has been designed to help Spanish-speaking learners be aware of the sounds of English and compare and contrast those sounds with the ones they have already mastered in their own native language. As noted, the Spanish language shares five vowels with the English language only in terms of graphemes because, in terms of phonemes, the sound a, e, i, o, and u produced in one language are different

from the other. In addition, the pronunciation of consonants also differs between the two languages.

Furthermore, although there is not much research on phonological awareness for adults learning a second language, I strongly believe that adult learners of a second language need to develop and build awareness of the sounds of the new language as they are different from their L1. There is vast research that supports the idea that phonemic awareness is key for children to learn to read, but where do we leave adult L2 education? At my age, and having studied English for more than ten years, I was barely able to segment certain words into isolated phonemes because I was never taught how words in English could be broken into smaller sound parts. It was only after I started teaching Spanish to kindergarteners in a dual language program that I began noticing the differences between alphabets in both languages and the importance of phonemic awareness in both languages, including isolation of sounds, first sounds, and segmenting. The way we learn in a foreign environment is by learning words as a whole, and we do not learn a language like native learners do although we do learn some of the rules and exceptions behind English pronunciation. I believe all English learners need to master phonics, and other elements of phonemic awareness including syllables, rhymes, beginning and final sounds, and segmenting in order to be better decoders, readers, and speakers of the English language no matter the age.

Although there are many phonics websites out there, I hope my website can specifically help those learners who speak Spanish to be aware of the differences and similarities that English and Spanish share in terms of alphabetical and sound principles. Even though the website I proposed is based on basic phonemic rules for vowel sounds and consonant sounds, I also hope I

can keep adding more elements and features of phonics to my website as there are many other

essentials that were left out of this project, elements such as diphthongs, the shwa sound, the

controlled-r sound, consonant blends, and other special sounds.

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